



Connecticut Farm Bureau Association
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Testimony in Opposition to:

Senate Bill No. 00032 AN ACT CONCERNING WORKING FAMILIES' WAGES.

House Bill No. 05066 AN ACT CONCERNING CERTAIN WORKERS' RIGHTS TO COLLECTIVELY BARGAIN.

Submitted by: Donald W. Tuller President, Connecticut Farm Bureau Association

The following testimony is submitted on behalf of the Connecticut Farm Bureau, a statewide nonprofit membership organization of 5,000 families dedicated to farming and the future of Connecticut agriculture.

Senator Osten, Representative Tercyak and members of the Committee,

I wish to express my opposition to Senate Bill 32 and specifically the provision to increase in the minimum wage beyond what was already passed last session and in opposition to House Bill 05066 which would remove a longstanding exemption for collective bargaining of agriculture.

I'm speaking as a farmer/small business owner, because this applies for all small businesses located in Connecticut, not just farmers. Tulmeadow Farm in West Simsbury is where I farm with my cousin Buzz Tuller. We raise vegetables, hay, grass fed beef and make ice cream. Our farm has been operated by Tullers since 1768. That's over 245 years, and I'd like to be able to continue the run. We have not yet had a chance to gauge the impact of the minimum wage increases already approved, and now more increases are being proposed? Connecticut is not an island. As producers, we compete with each other, other states, and other countries for our place in the marketplace. Connecticut Farm Bureau has been active in trying to open up marketplaces for locally produced food, (supermarkets, schools, hospitals, state institutions, etc.) One thing has been made very clear, there is very little interest in paying much of a premium for "local". Everyone seems to like the idea of organic vegetables. Did you know that organic food production tends to be more labor intensive than other growing methods? These increases will disproportionately impact small organic farmers who cannot afford to mechanize. One of the bright spots for farmers these days is value added food processing. We will be harder pressed to compete with farm products produced in other lower cost states, than we already are now.

When you raise the price of something, labor, you do not make it more valuable, you just make it more expensive. When something gets more expensive, without being more valuable, people use less of it. Think of how people drive less when gas prices go up. That's why these types of increases actually reduce employment. Do you really think that you will be getting economic justice for workers at the Walmarts, McDonalds and other national chains? They are probably smiling. These wage increases will help clear the field for them in a way that they couldn't do themselves. Small businesses will have to pass on these increases, they don't have profits from other areas of the country that the national chains do, and as a result,

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small businesses will be less competitive than they are now. The chains can hold their prices until we are gone, and then restore their profit margins, since there will be less local competition.

Did you know that Connecticut Farm Bureau Members donated over a quarter of a million pounds of food to local food banks? I donated over 20,000 pounds of vegetables myself, mostly sweet corn that I picked myself. I may be hiring fewer workers this year. I do not know if I will have the time this year to donate as much or the more that I was hoping to. You have made it more expensive for farmers to help those in need, and now you will be making it even worse.

We are hearing about some farmers that are looking into, or already have, the purchase of land in other states with relocation in mind. The Connecticut Greens Industry, particularly the wholesale growers are competing to supply the big boxes with plants. How do you expect them to stay here in Connecticut? Now there are more increases being stacked on?

The passage of House Bill 05066 will add even more costs to Connecticut Farmers who are left, and make it even more difficult to compete with, with agricultural products produced in who where farmers are protected from collective bargaining. Farmers in Connecticut now struggle to find enough workers that they can afford. The need to get a crop harvested is sufficient leverage, without an organized job action. Please maintain the exemption on collective bargaining of agricultural workers.